

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

July 2002

Sunday, July 14: Herding Freethought Cats

Special Points of Interest

- AOF now has 501(c)(3) status!
- Last month's speaker becomes nationally (in)famous!
- AOF greeted the community at the Lambda Freedom Fair!
- Godless Americans March on Washington D.C. November 2

Herb Silverman is a Professor of Mathematics at the College of Charleston. From 1990-1997 he fought the unconstitutional provision in the South Carolina Constitution that prohibited atheists from holding public office. He founded the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry in Charleston, SC. and is founder and faculty advisor to the College of Charleston student Atheist/ Humanist Alliance. Herb is spokesperson for the SC Secular Council. A board member of Atheist Alliance and American Humanist Association, Herb is also regional director to the Council for Secular Humanism, advisory board

member of the Secular Student Alliance; and founder of the Coalition for the Community of Reason (an umbrella group of ten national freethought organizations). He will talk a little about his challenge to the South Carolina Constitution, which prohibited atheists from holding public office. He will then speak about his challenge to the freethought movement to spend more time cooperating than competing. We have met the enemy, and it is NOT us. It is the likes of Ashcroft, Falwell, and Robertson. We will discuss ways we can work together and make a difference in our community of reason.

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A Real Milestone for AOF !

By Mynga Futrell

Following a day of discouraging national news—dispiriting for those of us who care about hanging on to our *secular* nation—one piece of cheerful news arrived in AOF's mail.

On Friday, June 28, 2002, when our treasurer Ken Nahigian opened the envelope, much board anxiety evaporated. Whew! Hooray! Hey, we did it! We received our much-hoped-for "letter of determination" from the Internal Revenue Service, and it pronounced AOF's tax exempt status as a 501(c)(3)! [Editor's note: Read more about that in AOF Line, p. 2].

This is an important "promotion" for the club, and something we all can celebrate while we bewail this ghastly U.S. Supreme Court voucher ruling. The Supremes have created a huge gaping hole in our wall, the same wall that has enabled our unique experiment in government to flourish for two hundred years.

At this point, nonreligious people had better do more than their usual lamentations. There is a need to step forward, be visible and, yes, be political. *The times*, dear friends, *they are a-changing*.

The AAI Connection

A Look at the AAI's Award-Winning Website

The AAI Web site may well be the Internet's premier freethought web site, with encyclopedic information and links to freethought around the world. With the leadership of Joe Zemel and Dave Feroe, this site has received awards, including being named the essential atheist link by Yahoo. Those who haven't yet explored the site should visit when they have some time to spend checking out the extensive information and entertainment it offers.

Of the twenty items listed at the top of the home page, several are of special interest. The Freethought Directory, an abridged version of the book, allows the visitor to get contact information on freethought organizations around the world. Click on Awakenings, and you find a collection of short quotes on becoming atheist. Links to atheism on the Internet are catalogued, so the visitor clicking on Bible and

Criticism, for example, will find nineteen different sites to explore.

There's a page discussing Family Issues, and the Library with essays, pamphlets and poetry. Local groups can download their preferences from a variety of animate and inanimate graphics.

Scroll down the page to In the News, where the 2002 Convention photos are posted. Or check out the forum for Young Atheists, an e-group for teens and preteens

Book and video recommendations offer links to Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk. The latter, for the United Kingdom, offers some material not offered in the U.S. Purchases made through this link reap the Alliance a cut of five to fifteen percent of the total purchase, money that may find its way back to your local group as a matching grant.

AOF Board

President: Mynga Futrell

Vice President: Kevin Schultz

Secretary: Ed McConnell

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Kay Dickey

Dave Flanders

Don Knutson

Betty Simonsma

Jerry Sloan

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Kay Dickey (Editor)

Mynga Futrell, Jerry Sloan

Visibility and Impact:

Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell,

Kevin Schultz, Jerry Sloan

(more members welcome!)

AOF's Voluntariat

Atheist Alliance Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Hank Kocol

Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

Internet Website:

Pat Kelley

Meetings:

Dave Flanders,

Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

Membership Database:

Betty Simonsma

Voicemail System:

Jerry Sloan

The AOF Line

How can our club gain more clout in our community? Atheists are invisible (partly our fault). We need to find ways we can better achieve our purpose. Having more members would help. *Do all your free-thinking friends belong? Invite them.* Another way is to have present members be more active. *Is there something you'd like to do for us/with us?* Another is to garner more funds to do more activities to get more members, and so on.

One step AOF's board has taken recently is to seek 501(c)(3) status with the IRS. AOF formed in 1993 as *California nonprofit* association. With a bit of history under our belt,

it was past time for the club to be more than that. Taking this formal step has benefits for those who wish to increase their financial support to our group. With this standing, members can now more readily participate in payroll deductions or various donation mechanisms.

AOF owes many thanks to **Paul Geisert** for his efforts in spearheading this project. He really took this bull by the horns in January, and he put in many hours since while carrying the application process to fruition. Paul had to deal with an awkward timeframe, too! (The process began with our "old

board" and then we elected a "new board.") A bit of legal advice from **Greg Elvine-Kreis** helped Paul negotiate those additional hurdles.

Kevin Schultz, as our secretary last year, played a major role in assisting Paul with the paperwork, and **Ken Nahigian**, who has been our intrepid treasurer in recent years, supplied a financial track record that satisfied all the IRS bean counters. Everything was in such good shape that **Mynga Futrell** had only to clear up a few last minute details and answer a few questions from the Internal Revenue staffer. One step in this "climb to clout" is now behind us.

Recap—Last Month’s Meeting

By Ed McConnell

Dr. Mike Newdow, speaker at the June meeting, is a physician, law school graduate (but not practicing attorney), and the plaintiff in federal lawsuits seeking to eliminate "under God" from the pledge of allegiance, the presence of ministers at presidential inaugurations, and theistic references in Congressional resolutions. His legal position is that these are violations of the establishment clause.

He started with some historical background dating to colonial America. He noted in particular the decision *not* to invoke "God" references in the preamble to the constitution and the clear statement in the Bill of Rights prohibiting the establishment of religion.

Mike discussed recent Congressional resolutions that clearly call

for an establishment of religion, and cited the speeches of Franklin Graham and Kirby John Caldwell at the Bush inauguration making Jesus



Roll Up Your Sleeves and Repair the Wall!

references. He also summarized the history of "In God We Trust" on American currency and the "One Nation Under God" motto.

He discussed several court decisions on religion-government issues. These included *Torcaso* (striking down religious qualifications for holding public office), *Abington versus Schemp* (on Bible reading in public schools), and *Lemon vs. Kurtzman*, which created the three-prong test on government involvement with religion. Of particular interest was the *Lee v. Weisman* decision (1992), which prohibited clergy leading prayers at high school graduation ceremonies as a violation of the es-

tablishment clause, and which he feels superceded some prior cases.

He discussed also some more arcane legal issues, such as having standing to sue, mootness, and ripeness. He noted controversies over separation of powers, and whether courts could be involved in congressional and presidential actions.

At times during his talk, he brought out his guitar and harmonica, offering some of the best free-thought music west of Dan Barker.

More information on his suit relative to the pledge of allegiance can be found on the internet at www.restorethepledge.com.

Editor’s note: Since the June meeting, the case on inauguration prayer has been dismissed (Judge Karlton found that the court had no authority to restrict a president from acting in a particular fashion.) On Wednesday, June 26, 2002, the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 2-1 in favor of Mike in another case, finding that Congress violated the Constitution’s establishment clause by adding the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954.

AOF’s Statement of Purpose:



The purpose of the association, Atheists & Other Freethinkers (AOF), is to promote the understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community. To accomplish

this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend Atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

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Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.

Looking Ahead

August's "Summer Sizzler"—Y'all Come!

You won't want to miss a hot time at August's general membership meeting! The air temperature outside will be fiery, no doubt, but now that Sierra 2 Community Center has installed central AC, Room 10's thermometer should read in the temperate zones—cool enough for two cool "buffets" (the tasty one and the verbal one) planned for those attending this meeting.

Food: It's to be a simple, summery, refreshing potluck (salads, desserts, beverages). Jerry Sloan is coordinating the food. He will pass a sign-up sheet around at the July meeting. Look in your August newsletter to see if certain items are being invited to fill out the variety. Now, back to the topic of "hot air."

Program: Lots of verbal variety, and maybe even music! Featured will be our "Freethought Speech Contests." Do plan to enter at least one of these!! (You can enter both.) It's free! Audience voting (in secret) will enable ranking of contestants' oratory, and then winners and runners-up announced. There will be prizes for the best **two**-minute and **five**-minute oratory on any topic related to the educational purpose (*see bottom, p. 2*). Mynga Futrell is coordinating the contests, and she will circulate a sign-up at both the July and August meetings (you can volunteer up to your last bite of dessert on August 11!). Civic inclusion for atheists is what AOF is all about, and it's a tough row to hoe about now. Prepare to wow the audience, and win!

Other Local Meetings in July

HAGSA Sunday, July 21 at 4:00 p.m. Potluck at the home of Ron and Sue Fegley. Call 645-1916 for more information.

SORT (Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking) - Wednesday, July 31, 7:00 p.m., at the La Sierra Community Center, Sierra One room, 5325 Engle Road in Carmichael, between Walnut and Garfield.

And don't forget the Second Annual SORT Potluck Picnic! Saturday, July 20, Cottage Park, 10:30 a.m.—3:30 p.m. More details and directions, call (916) 978-0321

Meet AOF Board

New board member Jerry Sloan is a charter member of AOF. Like many atheists, his journey to atheism has been a life long trek.

A native of Kansas City, MO., born on August 18, 1937, he was raised in a Fundamental, Independent Baptist Church and attended Baptist Bible College located in Springfield, MO, where he graduated in 1957 with a degree in theology. Jerry Falwell was a school-mate.

As a teenager Jerry knew he had an attraction for men but in those days there was no support or counseling for people who were homosexual. In 1961 his church asked him to leave when it was suspected that he might be homosexual.

In 1973 he joined the Metropolitan Community Church, a Christian church whose communicants are primarily gay and lesbian. He became a licensed minister and

served congregations in Kansas City, Des Moines, Wichita, Ft. Worth and Sacramento.

As a result of his bible studies, Jerry began to doubt the validity of the stories in the bible and eventually came to the conclusion that the stories therein were indeed myths.

Jerry has been an out-front civil rights activist, especially on gay and lesbian issues.

In Sacramento he became a member of the committee that planned the gay pride celebrations and in 1984 help found the Lambda Freedom Fair held each year in June. In 1986 he helped open the Lambda Community Center located at 20th and L Streets to serve the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered communities of Sacramento, and he served as president of the Lambda Community Fund for seven years.

Member — Jerry Sloan

In 1991 Jerry became alarmed about the rising political movement of the radical religious right and help start a watchdog group called Project Tocsin - a tocsin is an alarm signal - to monitor their activities by looking at public records and attending public meetings.

He is best known for his 1984 breach of oral contract lawsuit against Jerry Falwell, which he won, collecting nearly \$9,000 from Falwell. A portion of the proceeds was used to start the Lambda Community Center.

Jerry is excited about being a new board member and wants to work to help AOF become better known in the Sacramento area.

Visit Jerry's Project Tocsin site at: www.rthoughtsrfree.org/tocsin/tocsin.htm

Tahk'sin - A bell rung to give an alarm; the sound made by it; any alarm signal

Highway Cleanup

By Don Knutson

In special observance of the arrival of the Summer Solstice, the rugged crew of AOF highway cleaners hit the road to clean our two-mile stretch of Hwy. 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd.

AOF members Don Knutson, Sheree McDonald, Ken Nahigian, Kevin Schultz, and Lydia Sheridan were certainly delighted to be joined by a couple of members from our injured/retired reserve list in the personages of members



Mark your calendars!
The next cleanup will be
on August 17

Betty Simonsma and Dave Flanders, whose help was particularly useful as we found the stretch to be quite filthy as evidenced by the 25 bags of refuse we gathered.

The cloudy sky of the Saturday morning made for pleasant conditions as we did the local environment and its inhabitants a favor.

We will be returning to the site Saturday, August 17 at 8 a.m. for more good exercise and community.

Lyrics:

"In the Court of the Crimson King"

The wall on which the prophets wrote is cracking at the seams.
Upon the instruments of death
The sunlight brightly gleams.
When every man is torn apart
with nightmares and with dreams,
Will no one lay the laurel wreath
As silence drowns the screams.

Between the iron gates of fate,
The seeds of time were sown,
And watered by the deeds of those
who know and who are known;
Knowledge is a deadly friend
When no one sets the rules.
The fate of all mankind I see
Is in the hands of fools..."

—Peter Sinfield, 1969

Davis Community Meal

By Mynga Futrell

Davis Community Meals at St. Martin's will once again be looking to AOF to help with the set-up, serving and cleanup for its Tuesday, July 16 free meal for those Davis residents who are in need. DCM prepares the attractive and tasty (and free!) meals from food donated within the Davis community. The meals typically serve around 100. AOF has done "the

whole enchilada" just once before. At DCM's special request, we will repeat the exercise.

Volunteers are sought to help out at this event. If you've never done it before, don't be anxious. It's a little bit of work, a lot of fun, and we leave with a



really good feeling. We will gather at 3:45 PM at the Safeway store lot at (Alhambra and K) to car-pool to Davis for the setup and serve portion. Cleanup wraps by 7 PM. If you would like to volunteer or get further info., call Mynga (916-443- 5448).

Update on Injured AOF Board Member

By Dave Flanders

On March 27, 2002, as many of you know, I, while riding my bike to work, became a victim of a hit and run accident. With a fractured leg and no medical insurance, things looked bleak for me.

As the fibula bones in my leg were fusing back together, AOFers donated \$200 to assist me financially.

Two months later, I have returned to work. AOF member, Paul Storey, sold his truck to me. Thus, I am now back to work with great transportation. I am most grateful for all of your support.

Godless Americans March on Washington D.C.

American Atheists is sponsoring "Godless Americans—The March on Washington [TM] set for Saturday, November 2, 2002, on the mall in the nation's capitol. It's our turn now! For more information or to endorse this event by name, the website is [http:// www.godlessamericans.org](http://www.godlessamericans.org)

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, P O Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

Name(s) _____ Phone () _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail address (print legibly!) _____

Check your preference:

___ Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$8.00) ___ Family Membership (\$30.00)

___ Low-income Member (\$10.00) ___ Patron (\$50.00)

___ Single Membership (\$20.00) ___ Donation (\$ _____)

Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to organizations similar to AOF.

Please check here if you DO want to be on our AOF activist list.

A Freethinker of Note—Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

By Kenneth Nahigian

This month's famous freethinker was born in 1869. At age 13 his family pushed him into an arranged marriage. Two years later he visited his ill father, but left early to hurry home and have sex with his wife. Shortly after he left, his father died. Wracked with guilt, the young man forswore all physical pleasure and became a lifelong ascetic. I'm guessing, but his wife was probably pretty ticked.

His name was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

As a law student in London, Gandhi took an interest in music and religion. Equally impressed with all religions, he was partisan toward none, except that he became outspoken about vegetarianism.

Passing the bar in 1891, he went to Southern Africa and worked to improve rights of immigrant Indians there. There he evolved a creed of passive resistance, *satyagraha*, meaning "truth force." Protests frequently landed him in jail. But be-

fore returning to India in 1915, he had radically changed the status of South African Indians.

Hailed as a celebrity in India, Gandhi agitated for fair labor conditions, especially for textile workers. He opposed indentured servitude, fought the cast system, and advocated Indian-Muslim unity. He also called for "home rule in the name of justice and for good of humanity," which drew the attention of British authorities.

His main weapons were popularity and public fasting. When opposing some injustice, he would simply announce a fast and starve himself nearly to death. Massive public strikes and waves of civil disobedience followed, invariably forcing the government to consider his demands.

Not an outspoken opponent of religion, Gandhi did advocate humanism and total religious tolerance, as well as cast and racial tolerance. He inspired freethinkers and humanists

all over the globe, including Bertrand Russell, Einstein and Margaret Sanger.

The Gora family, who worked closely with Gandhi and the nationalist movement for freedom, founded the Atheist Center of India in 1940.

Here's my favorite Gandhi quote: Someone once asked Gandhi what he thought of Western Civilization. His reply: **"I think it would be a great idea."**

Gandhi died in 1948, victim of an assassin. Years of asceticism, fasting and personal neglect, including a lifelong refusal to wear shoes, had rendered him sickly and frail, arthritic, feet calloused, eyes weak, and even his teeth badly decayed. Still he stayed cheerful, optimistic to the end, and spiritual in the humanistic sense.

One might say he was a *super calloused fragile mystic plagued with halitosis*.

AOF Board Meeting

At a Glimpse

Board turned over to the new impact committee the subject of whether to accept ads in our newsletter (and if so, at what rates and with what restrictions), along with the subject of how to improve the publicity for our organization), asking that the committee to make its recommendations to the board.

Board voted to purchase a tent for fair booths and outreach.

Board will clean up and revamp the newsletter exchange listing.

Jerry will receive the voicemail messages with Kevin as backup.

Service: Mynga will chair the July Davis Dinner project, and Kevin will do the same in October.

Programming: August meeting will be “summer sizzler” with speech contests and salad/dessert potluck. Jerry will coordinate the food, and Mynga will coordinate the contests. September—Larry Judkins as the speaker, with Betty presenting the freethinker biography. October—speaker will be Bobbie Kirkhart, AAI co-president. The idea of having of freethought music on occasions garnered smiles.

Outreach: The board tentatively decided to have a table at the CSUS campus during freethought week in October.

Board voted to endorse the American Atheists March on Washington.

Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V editor, Kay Dickey, at this e-mail address:

frethnkr@mindspring.com

or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

Preference is given to material submitted online in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Notepad*. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF 's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.

Some Gandhi Quotes

My religion is based on truth and non-violence. Truth is my God.

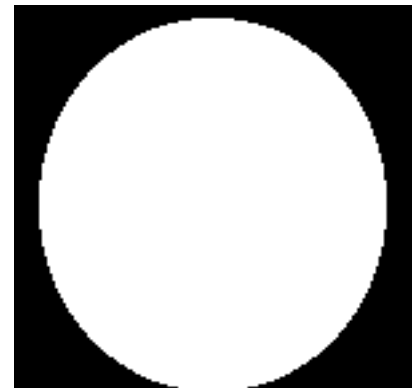
Every formula of every religion, in this age of reason, must submit to the acid test of reason and universal assent.

Nonviolence is the first article of my faith, the last article of my creed.

Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes.

To befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion.

My religion is a matter solely between my Maker and myself.



Lambda Freedom Fair

By Kay Dickey

AOF had a booth at the Lambda Freedom Fair for the second year in a row on Saturday, June 15. The volunteers who staffed the booth were Don Knutson, Kevin Schultz, Lydia Sheridan, Richard Aylward, Dave Flanders, Jerry Sloan, Ed Mc Connell, Hank Kocol, Cleo Kocol, and Kay Dickey. This was a fun event, with food and music nearby, and lots

of people stopping by the booth for conversation and to pick up our literature. Several folks signed the list to receive a free newsletter. AOF took out a paid ad in the event program this year which explained the Sacramento Freethought community and directed those interested to the Sacramento Freethought website.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

We'll be pleased to send one free newsletter to any person upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$8 per year. Or, better yet, why not become a member. That way, you'll get our newsletter free as part of your membership!



P.O. Box 15182
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

We're on the Web!

www.rthoughtsfree.org/aof.htm

Calendar of Events

General Meeting, Sierra II Center, Room 10	Sunday, July 14, 12 noon
Davis Community Meal	Tuesday, July 16, 2002, at 4:-7:00
Board Meeting (open to AOF members)	Sunday, July 28, 9:30 AM
Movie at Tower Theater	Sunday, July 28, 1:15 PM
Next Highway Cleanup	Saturday, August 17, 8:00 AM

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

AOF meetings are open to the public and are held on the second Sunday of every month, from noon to 2:30 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour Voice Mail, call 920-7834.

